

GOVERNMENT
OF
THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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OFFICE OF PLANNING

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DEANWOOD STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN
MAYORAL HEARING

+ + + + +

THURSDAY
NOVEMBER 15, 2007

OFFICE OF PLANNING STAFF PRESENT:

HARRIET TREGONING,	Director
GERALDINE GARDNER,	Associate Director,
	Neighborhood Planning
EVELYN KASONGO,	Ward 7 Neighborhood
	Planner

The Mayoral Hearing on the Deanwood Strategic Development Plan by the District of Columbia Office of Planning convened at 6:22 p.m.; Steve Lee presiding.

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P-R-O-C-E-E-D-I-N-G-S

6:22 p.m.

DIRECTOR TREGONING: I am Harriet Tregoning. I am the Director of D.C.'s Office of Planning. And I want to welcome you to the Mayor's Hearing for the Deanwood Strategic Development Plan.

I want to thank the members of the Steering Committee and the public for working very diligently over what's been nine months to accomplish this plan.

Tonight is really the culmination of the work that we've done together, and this is also your opportunity to look at the draft plan that we've prepared together and tell us your comments on any areas you think still need to be improved before it's entirely final.

I want to particularly recognize Evelyn Kasongo. Thank you, Evelyn. She's our Ward Seven Neighborhood Planner. She was very ably assisted by our consultant team of Zommer, Gunsul, Frasca and Circlepoint. And they've worked very hard, leading us through this process. And I want to thank then, also.

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1 The purpose of tonight's hearing is for
2 our office, on behalf of Mayor Fenty, to receive your
3 testimony on the draft plan that we released
4 originally October 15th. So we want to invite you
5 tonight to present your comments and suggestions on
6 the plan, which then we'll use to make any further
7 revisions to that plan, prior to submitting it to the
8 City Council. The City Council will also hold either
9 a public round table or a hearing, in case there are
10 any additional community comments that people would
11 like to voice. So there's this opportunity and also
12 with the City Council to talk about how the plan
13 might still be able to be amended or improved.

14 At the final public meeting in September,
15 we presented recommendations for five focus nodes.
16 And they're presented here on the boards. We
17 received, even at that hearing in September, some
18 really helpful, specific feedback about how we could
19 strengthen the recommendations. Specifically, we
20 heard that preserving the physical character of the
21 community was incredibly important to people here,
22 and that promoting affordable housing preservation;

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1 keeping the affordable housing that's already here
2 was important. Also people wanted better access to
3 parks and open spaces. And you should now find that
4 all of those things are much better highlighted in
5 our recommendation.

6 We hope that the draft plan addresses
7 these points. But we welcome any suggestions you
8 still have to make on where we could be more
9 specific, more pointed, more explicit in our
10 recommendations. This is really an exciting time for
11 this plan, because we've worked together for nine
12 months to come up with these recommendations and
13 these ideas. But a plan is just a piece of paper
14 until it gets implemented. So this gets us to the
15 phase where we begin to implement this plan.

16 As we move toward that implementation,
17 we're going to rely on the strong local organizations
18 and neighborhood leaders that you have here to be
19 stewards of the new growth and investment in this
20 community. That doesn't mean we go away. We want to
21 be your partners as we move forward to implement the
22 plan that we've developed together. So thank you

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1 very much. I'm going to turn it over to Evelyn,
2 who's going to walk us through kind of reviewing the
3 process that we've engaged in over these last nine
4 months.

5 MS. KASONGO: Thanks, Harriet. I'd like
6 to reiterate, really briefly, what Harriet had
7 mentioned when she first came up. I'd like to thank
8 every one of you for really putting in a lot of
9 effort and time during this process. So I think you
10 all really need to give yourselves a hand, because we
11 wouldn't be where we are today without your input.
12 So thank you very, very much.

13 This initiative was part of the Great
14 Streets Initiative, which was developed by the former
15 Mayor, Anthony Williams. And essentially, Great
16 Streets focuses on seven major corridors within the
17 District. Two of the corridors are located here that
18 we've been working on, Nanny Helen Burroughs Gateway
19 and Minnesota Avenue. The purpose of the Great
20 Streets is to increase economic development by
21 improving the physical, economic, and safety
22 conditions of the corridor.

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1 Now this has been a joint effort with
2 other agencies, specifically the Deputy Mayor for
3 Planning and Economic Development, as well as the
4 D.C. District of Transportation (DDOT). So, as far
5 as this planning process, we began in March of 2007,
6 this past March. And we've had a series of five
7 Steering Committee Meetings, and also five public
8 meetings. Our last public meeting was held in
9 September of this year. And, as a foundation of the
10 plan you, as a community as well as our Steering
11 Committee, developed seven specific goals relative to
12 the plan. And those goals are live, work, worship,
13 play, learn, and go. And those of you who are here
14 this evening have copies of the plan, kind of further
15 highlighting those recommendations specific to those
16 goals mentioned, as a foundation of this plan. And
17 there were six focus nodes that we focused on for
18 this planning process. Those nodes were the
19 Minnesota Benning intersection, the Deanwood Metro
20 Station, Minnesota and Nanny Helen Burroughs Gateway,
21 the Sheriff Eastern Gateway, and the Dix Street C
22 Pleasant Gateway.

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1 The plan highlights recommendations that
2 we've made relative to development at those specific
3 nodes. And one of the things that we heard at the
4 last public meeting was the need and desire to be a
5 little bit more specific in terms of the
6 recommendations that we made within the plan. And
7 since the release of this document, 30 days ago, to
8 the public, we've been working to do just that;
9 provide more specificity related to the goals and
10 recommendations that we've made and highlighting
11 those agencies that we think are going to help us
12 carry through these implementation tasks that we've
13 identified them with.

14 I received several phone calls from some
15 of our. At our last meeting, we put the word out as
16 far as creating a D Ward task force, as we moved
17 forward in developing this plan and implementing the
18 plan. And a lot of you have already expressed
19 interest in serving on that task force. So I look
20 forward to working with you and working out the
21 specifics of that, as we move toward implementation
22 over the next several months, and working with those

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1 agencies and identifying the short term goals that we
2 can accomplish within a reasonable amount of time,
3 for the completion of this plan.

4 So again tonight, thank you for coming
5 out this evening. We welcome all your comments and
6 feedback. And this is not the end of the planning
7 process. I look forward to working with you as we
8 move forward towards implementing a lot of the action
9 items that you'll find tonight in your packet. So
10 thank you.

11 MR. LEE: Okay. This meeting, unlike the
12 other workshops that have been very interactive, is a
13 formal public hearing. As you'll note in the back,
14 there's a gentleman in a blue shirt and a tie, over
15 on the side. He's actually recording this hearing.
16 It's official. And so, if you come up, if you give
17 testimony, be sure to give your name clearly and
18 spell it, so that he can get it right and into the
19 record.

20 So let me lay out a couple of the other
21 ground rules for this evening, because it is a formal
22 event. Again, it's for the Mayor, through his agency

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1 heads, to receive public testimony. If you'd like to
2 provide testimony, you need to sign the list back
3 there and we'll bring it up. I've got it, but we'll
4 continue adding people if you want to offer
5 testimony. Each person has three minutes to provide
6 their testimony when they come up here. And you can
7 follow that up with written testimony if you'd like.

8 Let's see. You will be called in the order in which
9 you signed up. Right now, we have about seven people
10 signed up. If you came in late and haven't signed
11 both the sheets, please do so.

12 I think you've seen most of the staff
13 here. In addition to Harriet Tregoning and Evelyn
14 Kasongo, there's also Geraldine Gardner, all from the
15 Office of Planning. And it's not a form in which
16 they will answer questions here on the record, but
17 we'll be here until 8:00 and, if you have questions
18 of the staff, you can certainly pull them aside and
19 ask them. Or the consultant team will be here as
20 well.

21 So, and finally, copies of the report
22 will be available for public reference. About mid-

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1 December, I understand, this will have incorporated
2 these comments and be forwarded on to the City
3 Council. The City Council will make its
4 deliberations happen on its schedule. So there's
5 another round of opportunity for public comment
6 through the City Council process.

7 So I think I've covered all the ground
8 rules for tonight. If you don't have any questions,
9 what I'm going to start doing is calling up the
10 speakers who have identified themselves. And I'll
11 ask you to come to the front and do your three
12 minutes. And the first speaker is Cheryl Cort.

13 MS. CORT: Hi. My name is -- is this on?

14 MR. LEE: Yes.

15 MS. CORT: My name is Cheryl Cort and I
16 am on the Advisory Committee and I work for a non-
17 profit called Coalition for Smarter Growth, and have
18 been working on community development and
19 transportation planning issues in the Ward 7
20 Community for the last few years, and also worked on
21 the Great Streets, Minnesota Avenue effort. And I
22 appreciate the -- the attention that the Office of

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1 Planning has provided to this community after a long
2 time of not seeing a lot of attention by the Planning
3 Office here. So I appreciate that and I think that,
4 overall, this is a very helpful plan in guiding
5 future actions and really sort of helping guide
6 Government and private sector actions to -- to make
7 this community a better place to live.

8 I have a couple of specific
9 recommendations. In addition, I guess, is that I
10 want -- I'm -- I'm concerned that we see clear
11 policies, review standards, enforcement of laws and
12 regulations, and Government oversight as the clear
13 translation of, sort of, the aspirations in this
14 plan. Specifically, I appreciate the focus on
15 expanding home ownership opportunities for existing
16 residents, and welcome the Residential Design
17 Guidelines, which are needed and -- and important.
18 But I'm -- I'm concerned that we make sure that these
19 would be enforceable by Office of Planning, so they
20 really can be truly implemented.

21 I support the recommendation about
22 encouraging mixed use development in commercial

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1 areas. But I think that it's important that we apply
2 design guidelines to commercial areas, as well, to
3 make sure that we can enhance a pedestrian oriented
4 environment and make this a safe and vibrant place to
5 be and -- and a very attractive place to be.

6 Again, I also -- regarding the downtown,
7 Ward 7 conceptual illustrative -- I think that it's
8 important to work quickly to provide more design
9 guidance that can be enforceable as we're looking at
10 potential new development here. We really need to
11 insure that we're guiding private sector investment
12 in a way that will best serve the community.

13 But, in general, I appreciate this plan
14 and that's all I have to say. Thank you.

15 MR. LEE: Chris LoPiano, are you here
16 with similar interest. We'll run down the list and
17 go to the third person. Sylvia Brown, who is the
18 president of the Deanwood Citizens' Association?

19 MS. BROWN: Good evening. I am Sylvia
20 Brown, President of the Deanwood Citizens'
21 Association. And last week I did submit a letter to
22 Director Tregoning and Ms. Kasongo and others,

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1 expressing disappointment with the lack of
2 specificity in the guideline as well as in the
3 Strategic Plan, as well as concerns about zoning
4 overlays and things of that nature. So I have
5 submitted more detailed specific points that I
6 gathered from attending last night's Spinning Road
7 Land Development meeting, which was quite helpful in
8 bringing out some of the points that the community
9 and others had expressed over the course of the last
10 nine months.

11 But to give some general comments,
12 specifically overall, the document was disappointing
13 because it does not create, in my opinion or the
14 organizations's opinion, the energy and excitement
15 that is the potential of Deanwood and the plan's
16 footprint. It -- and it really doesn't live up to
17 the expectations that Director Tregoning laid out at
18 the opening of the planning process.

19 A few points that need to be brought out
20 overall, again, is the development and implement
21 design guidelines in districts to protect the
22 character of the neighborhood and insure future

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1 development scale and appearance are respective of
2 the historic character and the African American
3 history of Deanwood; develop and implement parallel
4 plans and strategies that address residents' current
5 quality of life concerns, while future planning moves
6 forward. Specifically related to public ramp
7 infrastructure, i.e., alleys, sidewalks, gutter
8 construction, vacant and abandoned property abatement
9 with evaluation of the effectiveness of the Home
10 Again Initiative in tax sale avenues, and
11 construction code and permit enforcement.

12 Additionally, the community was quite
13 disappointed with the supportive language for the
14 Good Success Community Development Corporation,
15 particularly in changing residential zoning to
16 commercial zoning. Interestingly, it seems that,
17 that sort of supportive language seems contrary to
18 the market analysis aim to control sprawl and create
19 contiguous zoning with design and scale, where
20 residential and neighborhood serving retail are
21 complimentary and exist harmoniously.

22 In general, again, additional points in

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1 relation to transportation and infrastructure,
2 identifying and implementing the Federal and city
3 government's -- my time -- preferred choice for
4 constructing the missing link of Minnesota Avenue;
5 insuring complimentary improvements to 295 Kenworth
6 Avenue, Eastern Avenue underpass, and Great Streets
7 Investments in Nanny Hill Burroughs Avenue and
8 Minnesota Avenue. And again, the more extensive
9 comments have been submitted to the Office of
10 Planning.

11 MR. LEE: Thank you, Syliva. Kia
12 Chatmon, a resident in the neighborhood; Kia, are you
13 here? I don't see her. Dr. William Bennett, III,
14 from the Good Success Christian Church and
15 Ministries?

16 DR. BENNETT: Thank you. Good evening.
17 To our honorable Mayor, in his absence, to the
18 elected officials that are here. and to the Office of
19 Planning that, in my view, has done a great job in
20 helping facilitate this process, and to all of the
21 citizens of the community that are here this evening,
22 thank you for the opportunity to share with you.

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1 It's been a real privilege to have been a
2 part of the steering committee of this Deanwood
3 Strategic Development planning process. It was great
4 and it is great to see people come together from all
5 walks of this great community and beloved community
6 and put their heads together to help shape the future
7 of the community. I've served in this community for
8 some 16 years as a pastor, and it is a -- it is a
9 place that has a great respectable past. But it has
10 much blight and much improvement to be done to make
11 it an even greater place to live, work, play,
12 worship, learn, and to shop. And I am very proud to
13 say that we at the Good Success Community Christian -
14 - or the Good Success Christian Church, as well as
15 our Community Development Corporation, have been
16 doing a great work, on our part, to not just talk
17 about the problems, but to be a part of the solution.

18 We have a God given vision to restore and
19 transform lives and to transform the community. And
20 toward that end, time will not permit me to talk
21 about all of the multiple programs and ministries
22 that we've implemented to meet those needs, but I

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1 promise you if there is a need for youths, young
2 adults, and especially for me, Good Success is at the
3 forefront of helping to restore and transform lives.

4 We have -- we sought to do what Christ
5 told us to do, and that is to bring light to dark
6 places. And the truth is that, again, Deanwood has a
7 respectable past, but there is still -- and
8 demographics will support it -- a lot of darkness
9 that needs to be extinguished. And the only way to
10 extinguish darkness is to bring light into a
11 situation. And light is good people coming together;
12 putting politics aside; putting their own personal
13 agendas aside; and coming together to try to improve
14 the quality of life for the whole community. And
15 that's what we've been seeking to do.

16 We have, on the drawing board, a 47,000
17 square foot building called the Community Empowerment
18 Center that's going to provide a multitude of
19 services for the people of our community. It will
20 also have a fitness center. It will also have a
21 restaurant, much needed kinds of services, as well as
22 spaces for the community building -- other community

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1 building entities. We hope to create a major
2 economic anchor through the potential housing of a
3 service center for persons that are reentering the
4 community from incarceration. And there's been much
5 debate about this, but the truth is all of us are ex-
6 offenders in one way or another, and some of us got
7 caught and some of us didn't. But our God given duty
8 tells us that we've got to reach out to the least,
9 the last, the almost forgotten and try to help
10 transform and restore their lives.

11 We're also working on a multitude of
12 housing that will be affordable, that will help to
13 clear up some of the blight of the lots that are in
14 our community. Thank you for this short time to
15 share, and thank you all for being here.

16 MR. LEE: Next on the witness to speak
17 list is ANC Commissioner Dorothy Douglas. She's the
18 Chair of ANC 7D. Is Ms. Douglas here? I'll go back
19 up the list and is Chris LoPiano -- has he arrived?
20 Tarik Oduno?

21 MR. ODUNO: Thank you. First and
22 foremost, give an honor to the Creator; give an honor

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1 to those who have helped us here, Sister Harriet and
2 Sister Evelyn; give an honor to the entire steering
3 committee group, as one who has lived in Deanwood; as
4 one who has taught at the Integrated Design
5 Electronic Academy Institution, where we have our
6 young people who are not only our future leaders, but
7 they're our present leader.

8 Under the area of live, work, shop,
9 learn, and play, I am focusing on and supporting the
10 area of what we call the learning spaces. One, in --
11 in a state of the mid-west, a professor stated the
12 leading training ground for people who believe the
13 ultimate reason for gardening is not growing plants,
14 but rather the cultivation and perfection of people.

15 We here in Deanwood -- we have done excellent things
16 past, but really, we need to step it up some. And
17 so, we who are here as students of Dr. George
18 Washington Carver with the Carver School on 45th
19 Street, we believe that the green spaces which is
20 catching a little fire here in -- in this part of the
21 country, we think that the green spaces are very
22 important, because not only does it beautify the

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1 physical environment, but it also perfects the people
2 in the environment.

3 And last, I would like to say that, as
4 one who works diligently with the Good Success
5 Christian Church and Ministries, I am proud to be a
6 member there. I have been helped. I'm continuing to
7 be helped. And sometimes we have to not only help
8 those who are in the mid-level and the top level, but
9 we also have to help to pull the boats up from the
10 bottom of the river. It is my believe that our work
11 here in Ward 7 is a part of that great, great work of
12 pulling up Ward 7. And 7, as you all know, is a
13 spiritually righteous number. Thank you.

14 MR. LEE: Thank you. Chris LoPiano with
15 City Interests is here. Do you want to come forward
16 and offer your testimony?

17 MR. LoPIANO: I apologize for being late,
18 this evening. The cross town traffic was absolutely
19 horrible, which puts a point on this plan. The city
20 needs more plans like this that anticipate greater
21 density around mass transit nodes to allow housing
22 and other commercial uses to be built up around the

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1 Metro subway stations so we can all leave our cars
2 home.

3 But I'm getting ahead of myself. My name
4 is Chris LoPiano. I'm here tonight representing City
5 Interests, a D.C. based developer. City Interests
6 fully supports the Deanwood, Nanny Helen Burroughs
7 Avenue, and Minnesota Avenue Strategic Development
8 Plan, and urges its official adoption. We have a
9 keen interest in the plan. This past June, City
10 Interests purchased a portfolio -- a large portfolio
11 of retail properties, many of them east of the river
12 -- four of them, in fact, in Ward 7. And the largest
13 of which, the East River Park shopping center is an
14 eight acre center, 155,000 square feet, located at
15 the southeast corner of Minnesota and Benning Avenue.
16 We also have a contract to purchase the northeast
17 corner of Minnesota and Benning and, in addition to
18 that, we have an interest in the Parkside PUD, a 14
19 acre project that is directly across the Metro tracks
20 and Kenneworth Avenue from the Minnesota Avenue Metro
21 station.

22 The proposed Strategic Plan is a -- an

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1 example of excellent urban planning, both in process
2 and in product. It appropriately places mixed use
3 density around the Metro station and elevates the
4 intersection of Minnesota and Benning to the -- to be
5 the retail and commercial core of Ward 7. This is
6 the function it has served in the past, a function
7 that its current land use envisions and one that this
8 plan builds upon. We believe the plan addresses the
9 environmental health, the transportation needs, the
10 retail needs, and the overall quality of life of Ward
11 7 residents and indeed residents of the entire city.

12 As the city's population grows, it's
13 going to be ever more important to locate the new
14 housing near mass transit nodes. The -- this plan
15 envisions that sort of development. The long under -
16 - long underserved neighborhoods east of the river
17 that have not had adequate retail services for many
18 years, and deserve it -- those kinds of services,
19 will also be supported by a plan like this that
20 envisions mixed use projects, mixed use development
21 that will have residential and office that supports
22 retail, integrated into the same development.

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1 The plan calls for a new transit and
2 friendly pedestrian environments. This approach --
3 we've seen this approach be very successful other
4 places in the region that have -- and that have built
5 upon the -- the investment that Metro has made in --
6 in stations around the area. It's long overdue for
7 Ward 7 to exploit the Metro investment in the
8 stations that exist in this part of the city.

9 City interests, the plan for East River
10 Park -- East River Park, envision the kind of
11 development that is in -- laid out in this plan. We
12 were taken aback by how closely our plans meshed with
13 the plans in this -- in the Strategic Development
14 Plan. We are excited about the projects we have
15 underway. We think that this -- this plan is
16 practical and achievable. And we think it's an
17 outstanding example of the public sector, the private
18 sector, and the community residents coming together
19 to plan their future. We urge its adoption. Thank
20 you, once again, for allowing me to testify in
21 support of this plan.

22 MR. LEE: Okay. Thank you. I see that

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1 Kia Chatmon, who was signed up to make some comments
2 is now here. Please, come forward.

3 MS. CHATMON: Good evening, everybody.
4 My name's Kia Chatmon. I am a Deanwood resident, the
5 current Treasurer of the Deanwood Citizens'
6 Association, and a member of a few committees that
7 they're working on historic preservation here in
8 Deanwood. Excuse me. I'm out of breath. Let's see.

9 My points? I wanted to let you know of a few things
10 that are distinguishing Deanwood as a community east
11 of the river. The communities I'm a -- communities
12 I'm a part of who are doing the historic preservation
13 have -- will be publishing a book on Deanwood's
14 history through Arcadia Publishing, next year, as
15 well as Deanwood will be the first neighborhood east
16 of the river to have a Heritage Trail, a walking
17 trail. You've probably seen many in some of the
18 neighborhoods west of the river on Shaw and E Street.

19 And Deanwood will have the distinction of being the
20 first neighborhood east of the river to have such a
21 trail.

22 The folks got together to work on the

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1 historic preservation because they knew change was
2 coming. I believe that the community deserves change
3 and I think people want change. We knew that change
4 was coming before the change, but I just want to
5 point out a few things I hope that the plan and the
6 city keep in mind as it adopts this Strategic Plan.

7 The historical preservation of the
8 neighborhood is important. I believe that Sheriff
9 Road, as well as Dean Avenue, now Nanny Helen
10 Burroughs, were once vibrant commercial corridors.
11 And I think that it can happen again. And I think we
12 look forward to having that happen again, but we just
13 need to be sure that the development that happens
14 both preserves the historic look and feel of the
15 community; that the housing that is developed is in
16 scale with -- with what is currently in the
17 neighborhood, as well as the retail is diversified.
18 I would hope that the plan keeps in mind not having -
19 - and I don't mean any offense to any merchants who
20 might be here -- any low quality or strip mall type
21 development in the community, but that we really
22 strive for a diversity of development.

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1 With regard to the historic preservation,
2 there are a lot of homes built by Black architects
3 and landmarks in the community, like the Strand, that
4 I think we should insure are preserved as this
5 development happens. And with regard to housing
6 being built to scale, I currently -- listen, I live
7 in Deanwood and there are a lot of -- as some of you
8 have vacant lots as well as vacant abandoned homes in
9 the community that I would like to see developed.
10 But one thing I have seen happen is people start
11 developing and it doesn't finish. We have a property
12 actually at 15th and Lee Street that is very much out
13 of scale with the neighborhood. It's empty. The
14 windows are broken. It looks like the developer has
15 abandoned it and some unfortunate things have
16 happened in the property. And I think it's actually
17 more of a blight than what was there prior to the
18 development. So I feel that to say that, as we move
19 forward with the plan, that I think it needs a little
20 bit more teeth to make sure that these things are
21 kept in mind, whether those are guidelines or
22 policies, working closely with the community to make

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1 sure those thing happen. I think the plan needs to
2 reflect that so that the development that happens is
3 more -- it works more for the development of the
4 community and not to the detriment of the community.

5 So that's really all I have to say. So thank you.

6 MR. LEE: Thank you, Kia. Has anyone
7 else signed up there in the back as to make comments?

8 With that, I will adjourn this evening's public
9 hearing. No.

10 (Whereupon, a person off mike is
11 speaking.)

12 MR. LEE: Okay. She's going to confirm
13 about the timing of the event.

14 DIRECTOR TREGONING: If you'd like to, I
15 was saying we could close the record and we could do
16 10 or 20 minutes of Q and A, if you just want to talk
17 about the plan and implementation. If you'd like to
18 do that, we could -- like I said -- close the record.

19 We could reopen the record in 20 minutes if anyone
20 else comes who wants to give testimony. Would that
21 work for you guys? Okay. Let's do that. We'll
22 close the record and we'll just have some Q and A.

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1 (Whereupon, the record was closed at
2 approximately 6:55 p.m.)
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